DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 425 253 UD 032 668

AUTHOR Edwards, Anthony L.
TITLE Booker T. Washington High School (1916-1974): Voices of Remembrance. Portraits of Excellence--African-American Teachers in an Urban Segregated High School--Columbia, South Carolina.
PUB DATE 1998-03-00
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern History of Education Society (Atlanta, GA, March 20-21, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Black Education; *Black Teachers; *Educational Environment; Educational History; Equal Education; *High Schools; School Culture; *Secondary School Teachers; *Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS *African Americans

ABSTRACT

The history of education contains many references to the inequities African American children suffered before the era of school integration, but few studies have described the positive interactions that took place in segregated schools. To remember segregated schools only for their poor resources presents an incomplete picture. Booker T. Washington High School was a segregated school with a sense of purpose and excellent teachers, both of which contributed to the positive development of African American youth and their communities. The school began in 1916 as the second school for blacks in Columbia (South Carolina), graduating its first class that year. In the early 1930s it was the only accredited high school for Negroes in the county, and one of three that awarded the state high school diploma to black students. Provided are grassroots descriptions of this school and its dedicated teachers based on interviews with 13 former students and historical records. The memories of these former students depict a school in which caring teachers, many of whom had been educated at prestigious northern schools, taught their students the standard curriculum as well as aspects of African American culture and history. The students' memories portray a school with an atmosphere of mutual respect and pride in which learning could take place. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 425 253

Booker T. Washington High School (1916-1974): Voices of Remembrance

Portraits of Excellence--African-American Teachers in an Urban Segregated High School--Columbia, South Carolina

by
Anthony L. Edwards
University of South Carolina-Columbia

Research paper presented at the Southern History of Education Society's annual meeting (March 20-21, 1998, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia)

Anthony Edwards, Ph.D.
The Graduate School
University of South Carolina
304 Byrnes Building, Columbia, SC 29208
(803) 777-4243; FAX: (803) 777-2972; E-Mail: ae@gwusc.sc.edu

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Anthony Edwards
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ED032668

Booker T. Washington High School (1916-1974): Voices of Remembrance

Portraits of Excellence--African-American Teachers in an Urban Segregated High School--Columbia, South Carolina

by
Anthony L. Edwards
University of South Carolina-Columbia

Lawrence Cremin (1960) in *Education in the Forming of American Society* argued that professional historians were responsible for the narrow school-centered accounts that dominated the field of educational history since the nineteenth century. He described a vision for a new "general interpretation." Cremin urged a broad and synthetic view of the educational enterprise in regional and local settings. He maintained that a more inclusive history would study the origins of the public school, but would also include other institutions, formal and informal, that have shaped American thought, character, and sensibility.[1] As the

---

[1]See *Lawrence A. Cremin: A Biographical Memoir* by Ellen C. Lagemann and Patricia A. Graham in *Teachers College Record* Volume 96, Number 1, Fall 1994.

Goodenow, R. K., & White, A. O. (1981). Education and the rise of the new South. Boston, MA: G. K. Hall and Company.

I. A. Newby (1973) noted in *Black Carolinians* that the history of blacks in South Carolina has been alternately neglected and misrepresented. General histories of the state omit or seriously distort it, and few monographs have ever treated it with sympathy and sensitivity. This is both cause and consequence of a vicious cycle of ignorance and

UD032668

field of American educational history moves down the road toward inclusion of all educational institutions and peoples that shared in its journey, it is essential to the continued growth of the field that the historical roots and contributions of the former, public, black, segregated high schools of the South be documented and recognized.[2]

The history of education has many references that depict the inequalities African American children experienced during the pre-integration era, but few studies that describe the positive interactions in segregated school environments. With the recent study of Caswell County Training School (Caswell County, North Carolina) by Vanessa Siddle Walker and a notable study by Faustine Jones on Dunbar High School of Little Rock, Arkansas, the "good/excellence"[3] in these

---

indifference which is difficult to break.

[2]Lawrence A. Cremin (1969) cited in *American Education: Some Notes Toward a New History* that we study history not because in its absence there will not be any history, but rather because in its absence we shall have a corrupt history: we shall have the myths, the distortions, and the ideologies that flourish in the absence of critical scholarship.

[3]I argue in this paper as Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot in that by *goodness/excellence* I do not mean an idealized portrayal of human experience or organizational culture, nor do I suggest that I (the portraitist) focus only on good things, look only at the bright side, or give a positive spin to every experience. Rather, I mean an approach to inquiry that resists the more typical social science preoccupation with documenting pathology of the African American experience with schooling in America and suggesting remedies. The nuance search for *goodness* is really a search for a generous, balanced, probing perspective. It is a search for the truth--or for the complex and competing truths that combine to shape an authentic narrative. See Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica

institutions and the evidence of these schools' positive roles in the black community are highlighted. In Jones' *A Traditional Model of Educational Excellence* (1981), the segregated school environment is described as "one's home away from home, where students were taught, nurtured, supported, corrected, encouraged, and punished." (p. 2) This segregated public school served black students from 1930 to 1955. Dunbar High was one of several excellent all-black public high schools that flourished in large U. S. cites earlier in this century. Faustine Jones surveyed Dunbar graduates and discovered that the school was a central factor in preparing them to become qualified, contributing adults.[4]

Vanessa Siddle Walker in her historical ethnography noted that the memory of inequality, in segregated schools, is thus not inaccurate. However, to remember segregated schools largely by recalling only their poor resources presents an historically incomplete picture. Although black schools were indeed commonly lacking in facilities and funding, some evidence suggests that the environment of the segregated school had effective traits, institutional policies,

---

Hoffman-Davis (1997) *The Art and Science of Portraiture*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

[4]Jones, F. C. (1982). Dunbar High School of Little Rock: A model of educational excellence. Phi Delta Kappan, 63 (8), 540-541. Also see, *Excellent Schools Their Characteristics* by John E. Brewton, 1944, Report of The Investigation of Educational Qualifications of Teachers in South Carolina.

and community support that helped black children learn in spite of the neglect their schools received from white school boards. Most notably, in one of the earliest accounts by Thomas Sowell (*Patterns of Black Excellence*), the schools were remembered as having atmospheres where support, encouragement, and rigid standards combined to enhance the self-worth of the students and increase their aspirations to achieve. In Sowell's description of six "excellent" black schools, students recount teachers and principals who would not let them go wrong; they described teachers who were well-trained, dedicated, and demanding and who took a personal interest in them, even if it meant devoting their own money, or time outside of the school day. Some of the schools cited were once outstanding but no longer, while others were, during the time of his study, academically successful. In his study, the research of the schools extended beyond such intangibles as atmosphere and school/community relations, as these could be either observed or reconstructed from archived historical documents and from oral interviews.[5]

---

[5]Walker, V. S. (1996). Their highest potential: An African American school community in the segregated South. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

Sowell, T. (1976). Patterns of black excellence. Washington, DC: The Ethics and Public Policy Center of Georgetown University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 282 785)

"Educational excellence" for Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot conjures up classical images of a time long ago when teachers were well trained, students were motivated, and parents cared. [See "On Excellence and Goodness" Harvard Educational Review, 57 (2), 202-205, May 1987] She notes in *The Good High School* (1983) that,

> In good high schools students are treated with fearless and empathetic attention by adults. Teachers know individual students well.... ...the students in good high schools feel visible and accountable. (pp. 25-26)

Booker T. Washington High School, fondly called Booker, was such a school. This former, public, segregated, black high school had a purpose, a heartbeat, people intact, and excellent teachers which contributed greatly to the positive development of black youth and their communities.[6] Frankie B. Outten, a longtime faculty member at Booker, said in a moving testimonial honoring the

---

[6]In this paper, it is necessary to view the student, the school, and the community as components of a complex interdependent system. The black community can be defined as those people who in some way served or were served by the school: Those who were directly involved in the school such as teachers, principals, and other school employees and students; those indirectly involved in the school such as parents of students and siblings of students; and those even less directly involved in the school like those who never attended the school but made use of its facilities or attended and/or supported school activities, such as sports and other extracurricular activities.

Rogers, F. A. (1974). The black high school and its community. A final report. Urbana, IL: Illinois University, Urbana. Department of Elementary Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 113 430)

memory of the school that, Booker represents a tradition to the black community of Columbia, a tradition of aspirations and excellence. To the Negro boys and girls who passed through its doors during its years of operation, this school was many things. For all of them it was their source of learning and intellectual development, and to many it was a home for the greater part of the day, a community center, and a shrine for their religious training. At the forefront, were the teachers. In this paper, I will share a brief historical background of the school and present fleeting portraits of African-American teachers that possessed traits deemed excellent by their students and members of the community. The grassroots descriptions of these excellent teachers are voiced by the people who knew them and whose lives were touched by them--while these collected memories are still available. This paper is based largely on oral interviews[7] with historical records and documents, periodicals, newspaper articles, and reports used to give historical context.[8] Recorded recollections are based on the informants'

---

[7]Charles L. Briggs (1986) in *Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research* said that interviews are used in exploring people's recollections of the past. The validity of a great deal of what we believe to be true about human beings and the way they relate to one another hinges on the viability of the interview as a methodological strategy.

[8]In this paper, the use of yearbooks, school newspapers, brochures, pamphlets, newspaper accounts, minutes of school board meetings, reports, secondary and primary historical sources, and other archival materials uncovered are used to corroborate emerging themes

own words describing their experiences with teachers at Booker.

Historical Background--Booker T. Washington High School

Booker began in 1916 as the second school for blacks in the city of Columbia, South Carolina. The first class graduated in 1919. The school was erected in 1916 as an elementary school, but became the high school two years later in 1918.[9] Maude Robinson, whose father C. A. Johnson was the first principal of Booker, recollects:

> I entered Booker Washington High School when I was six years old. It was both an elementary and high school. 1920. It was a very, very exciting day for me. ...I can remember at that time you walked down a hill coming to Booker Washington. And we were coming down the hill and I was holding his hand and I was just dancing, I was so happy. And we went into the building, and entered the door, and standing at the end of the little hall was a group of teachers. All of course African American. I saw one in a yellow dress. And I said to daddy, oh daddy look at that lady in the yellow dress. And he just laughed and took me on into the office and filled out some papers. He said, now I am going to take you to the classroom and introduce you to your teacher. This will

---

Frederick A. Rogers (1974) noted in *The Black High School and Its Community* that the public, segregated, black high schools were located in time. To truly be able to examine the role that these schools played at a particular time in a community, one must have some historical perspective.

[9]Johnson, C. A. (1936). Negroes. In H. K. Henning (Ed.), Columbia Capital City of South Carolina 1786-1936, (pp. 303-314). Columbia, SC: Columbia Sesqui-Centenial Commission, R. L. Bryan Company.

> be your first teacher. I went into the classroom. And it was the lady in the yellow dress.

In 1924, Booker became a standard high school of the State of South Carolina. The State Agent for Negro Schools at the time was J. B. Felton. He reported in the Fifty-Sixth Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Education (1924) that, "Several years ago the State Board of Education approved one high school. This number has been added to from year to year until during the year just closed there were seventeen high schools in this state with a high school enrollment of 1,533 children. These schools are invariably the county high schools . . . ." The conditions and advantages of Negro schools moved forward even with the noticeable things that hindered the progress of Negro education: short school terms, overcrowded conditions in classrooms, and poorly paid teachers. Nonetheless, Booker operated within South Carolina's dual educational system of "separate but unequal" until 1970. The school finally closed in 1974.

Remembering the Excellent Teachers

Faustine Jones (1982) notes that "teacher attitudes and teaching practices are the heart of education." Research has shown that teachers' attitudes toward

their students tend to become self-fulling prophecies.[10] In the period before World War II the concept of the activist African American teacher was highlighted. This central theme:

> The genuine teacher knows that his duty is not bounded by the four walls of the classroom. He is dealing with boys and girls to be sure, but he is dealing with something more--social conditions; The school is held responsible for the mental, moral, religious, and physical status of the people immediately touching it; The demand is more and more being made that the teacher concentrate his efforts upon this primary problem of improving the conditions under which the people live. . . . The work of the teacher in the classroom and the work of the teacher directly with the people of the community are regarded as of equal importance; If the Negro teacher is to regain the esteem of the public and assume his rightful position of leadership in reconstructing our lives, he must go outside the textbook and the classroom and grapple with practical problems of social welfare.[11]

Beginning in its early years, the teachers at Booker had advantages in regard to modern educational methods and standards. According to Principal C. A. Johnson, "As a group, they are equally as good if not superior to any other in the

---

[10]See, for example, Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobsen, *Pygmalion in the Classroom: Self-Fuling Prophecies and Teacher Expectations* (New York: Holt, 1968); Eleanor B. Leacock, *Teaching and Learning in City Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1969); and Alexander Moore, "The Inner-City High School, Instructional and Community Roles," in A. Harry Passow, ed., *Reaching the Disadvantaged Learner* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1970).

[11]Fultz, M. (1995). African American teachers in the South, 1890-1940: Powerlessness and the ironies of expectations and protest. History of Education Quarterly, 35 (4), 401-422.

state." The teachers were interested in professional growth and advancement. This was evident in the fact that large numbers attended summer school, and that all of them belonged to the Negro State Teachers Association[12] (Palmetto Teacher's Association) and subscribed to a number of professional magazines and journals.

In 1944, The Steering Committee of The Investigation of Educational Qualifications of Teachers in South Carolina published a four volume report. In the volume on *Excellent Teachers Their Qualities and Qualifications*,[13] an excellent teacher is a person who has personal qualities of agreeableness, consideration for others, sincerity, professionally interested and competent, scholarship and culture, respects children and is respected by children, and establishes wholesome pupil-teacher relationships. Moreover, an excellent teacher was interested and participated in the life of the community in which she/he taught. One eleventh grade student from Booker says of her teacher,

---

[12]I. A. Newby (1973) noted in *Black Carolinians* that black teachers and educators were aware of the problems of black schools. Early in the century they organized the Negro Teachers Association which undertook a cautious effort to improve their schools.

[13]Daniel, J. McT. (1944). Excellent teachers their qualities and qualifications. Report of The Investigation of Educational Qualifications of Teachers in South Carolina. Published by The Steering Committee of The Investigation of Educational Qualifications of Teachers in South Carolina, 106 Education Building, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

> She has an influencing way with her pupils. She is a type of teacher that can teach in a way in which if you don't learn what she is teaching you can't learn. She also can teach without fussing with her pupils. And above all she remembers that she was a child in school herself once.

Another student went on to say about another teacher,

> He was well suited for his position. He explain things plainly. He was easy to get along with and he treated you like you should be treated and he tried to answer every question you ask him.

Many of the teachers at Booker during the early years were from the Northern states. The school attracted first-rate teachers from prestigious schools that included the University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins, Northwestern, Yale and Cornell.[14] Maude Robinson remembers,

> First of all, you must remember we had wonderful teachers. And these teachers were all well educated and they were not all from Columbia. Some of them had come from different parts of the country to work there. And nearly every teacher had or was working on a master's degree. Many of them was studying at Columbia University.

Ethel Bolden recalls that,

> At this particular point in time, we had a lot of teachers from the Northern states because in those days they tried to employ teachers with experience. So a number of teachers applied for jobs and came South to get that experience.

---

[14]Moniz, D. (1986, January 13). The road to success: Columbia lost many of best and brightest graduates of BTW. The Columbia Record, p. B1.

Coach Robert Reynolds recollects,

> One thing you have to understand is the caliber of teachers we had there. You have to think of Booker Washington like a foundation for the kids in the community. ...I think that at Booker Washington there were a hand full of teachers or staff members who did not have a master's degree. These people went away every summer to Indiana, to Columbia University. They went every summer to further their education so they could do a better job in the community. ...We were always challenged to better ourselves so that we could do a better job in the community.

Ulysses Barber remembers,

> The principals and teachers at Booker T. Washington did a very good job under the circumstances. It had good teachers with degrees and they were committed people and they made you get your work.

His favorite teacher was Celia Dial Saxon. He says,

> She was a remarkable teacher. ...I tried to copy a lot of things that she did when I taught. ...Mrs. Saxon, the people had a lot of respect for her. Not only the students, but the community....

Joseph Ruff recalls having Mrs. Saxon for civics when he first came to Booker.

"She was elderly, but a very thorough teacher. She was the matriarch of Booker."

Maude Robinson tells wonderful stories surrounding Mrs. Saxon:

> Before each class, Mrs. Saxon would give us lectures about life. She gave us wonderful historical instruction, including African American History. We were not deprived there of learning about our history or our background. She was such a wonderful and dedicated teacher.

Ethel Bolden remembers that Mrs. Saxon was at Booker when she came there.

She did not have her as a teacher, but many of her friends did. She tells Mrs. Saxon's students today, that Mrs. Saxon will never die because they refer to her everyday. She had so many wise sayings and her students remember them to this day. They would say, "as Mrs. Saxon said" and they would repeat the sayings that she had taught them. John Stevenson says,

> Celia Dial Saxon ...was an outstanding pillar in this community.... I heard about her from my mother before I came back to Columbia and when I came back to Columbia I heard about her from teachers who were teaching in the school system who had come up under her. Who always referred to her and the influence she had on their lives, a very strong woman.

Carolyn Carter recalls that the legacy of Mrs. Saxon was always present at booker when she attended. Even though she was not there in body, her spirit remained alive through the history the school taught them. She remembers,

> We learned about Booker T. Washington, Mary McCloud Bethune, George Washington Carver, we would learn about them, as you know they were not in the history books. ...These were the people that went before us. We were all going to accomplish something. We were all going to bring our people to a different level.

Gardenia Fair fondly recalls Mrs. Saxon,

> Mrs. Saxon was in the high school. I was friends with her granddaughter, Thelma Heyward. She taught us to respect the teacher. Respect her knowledge.

Maude Robinson told me that she was learning impaired. She went on to say,

> At the time they didn't know what to call it. Today it is call dyslexia. I was dyslexic. I remember a teacher named Ms. Grant in the seventh grade. She would take me and some other students aside and work with us every day. She was so dedicated and so were we. I began to learn to read. I will never forget Ms. Grant.

Because of teachers such as Ms. Grant, Maude and other students with learning disabilities overcame these ailments to some degree. Maude reflects that,

> I remember my first year in the high school. I made the honor roll for the first time. The names of the students on the honor roll were posted on the wall of the school. My name was there. I was so proud and so was my father. I owe it to Ms. Grant and Ms. Butler who helped me so. Ms. Butler was a wonderful teacher too. She was a native of Columbia and very musical. On rainy days when we would have to sit in the auditorium and couldn't be outside, she played classical music on the piano for all the children. We had some wonderful training.

Maude graduated from Booker and went on to Fisk University where she majored in history and was a classmate of the famed historian, John Hope Franklin. Maude later received a master's degree in history from the University of Michigan and went on to become an educator in the New York City School System.

Esther Sims recalls that,

> In my segregationist experiences in schools, the teachers had such a great impact on me as anyone else in the world. Ms. Monteith was so strong, Christian values, and developing self-worth within the individual. The teachers made you do. You were capable, so you went ahead and did it.

Maude Robinson remembers the Monteith sisters,

> We had dedicated teachers. Teachers who identified to the children. Teachers who were very serious and yet sometimes there would be laughter and fun. For instance there were the Monteith sisters, both of them taught there. They were all dedicated. Dedicated teachers who actually loved the children and were proud of us and made us feel proud of ourselves.

According to Ulysses Barber, the teachers were strict disciplinarians.

> You were punished, even if it was severe, because the teachers loved you so. You were under the rule of the teacher from the time you left home, until you returned in the afternoon.

Coach Robert Reynolds (teacher at Booker 1958-1974) recalls that,

> We had students believing that we were responsible from them. From the time they got up in the morning, got dressed to go to school, until the time they got back home and their parents took over in the evenings.

In the early 1930s, Booker was the only accredited high school for Negroes in Richland County, South Carolina. The curriculum was standard according to the requirements of the State Board of Education. Booker was one of three Negro high schools in the state which awarded the state high school diploma. The early curriculum at Booker included basic academic courses in English, math science, and civics. The vocational curriculum included training courses in manual arts, carpentry, brick masonry, painting, cabinet making, cooking, sewing, laundering, and horticulture. Ulysses Barber says,

> I took brick laying. We had to haul sand out of a ditch in Maxcy Gregg Park.

[Maxcy Gregg Park was located about .5 miles from Booker T. Washington High School]

He remembers that,

> The teachers were good and strong. All of the teachers in the high school department were at least bachelor's degree, ...

Ethel Bolden says that the teachers not only taught, they were interested in our total development.

> It was not uncommon for teachers to stop in the middle of class to give you special attention, if the need arose.

Herbert Nelson remembers that the teachers were,

> old type teachers that made you get your lesson. You were there to learn.

He went on to say that he looked upon the teachers to further his goals in life. To give him a good background. He notes,

> The teachers were special in a way that the way they taught made you learn.

Carolyn Carter says,

> The teachers were very dedicated. ...They enjoyed doing what they did, they shared their lives with us, they made us feel like we were the most important people in the world, and they taught us pride and tradition. ...I remember Mrs. Washington was my history teacher, ...She told us you take with you wherever you go, your people and the pride for your people and you are going to make it alright. When you go out there in the world, what ever you do, remember you have us on your back. So therefore you don't do

> anything that's wrong or that would embarrass us. So in those days that was very important to us.

Coach Robert Reynolds goes on to say that,

> The main thing that we were concerned with was at least when the child graduated that he would fit himself some place in society and be a useful citizen to the community. In this work we kind of pride ourselves on that. So we try to find a place for every student. Every student that came to us. It is amazing that we sometimes think about it even now that we have all these different kinds of programs for students from back there we had basically two. But somehow they seemed to fit into those two and did quite well.

Michael Fultz says that in an examination of the educational content of the African American monthly press between 1900 and 1930, he was surprised to find meager commentary on issues related to black teachers or on the conditions and practice of teaching in African American schools. These journals virtually ignored the social roles of teachers, rarely highlighting them as role models or lauding their community contributions. In other words, issues concerning African American teachers were neglected.[15] Increasingly researchers have begun to reexamine the nature of the historically segregated schooling of African American children (Delpit, 1996; Foster, 1990, 1991; Irvine and Irvine, 1983, Jones 1981;

---

[15]Fultz, M. (1995). African American teachers in the South, 1890-1940: Powerlessness and the ironies of expectations and protest. History of Education Quarterly, 35 (4), 401-422.

Sowell, 1976; Walker, 1993, 1995, 1996).[16] This research extends the dominant paradigm, which has focused almost exclusively on the inequalities existing in segregated schools and begins to consider the elements which may have been "good," or valued, by the participants in those environments. According to Vanessa Siddle Walker, the relationship between school and community was mutually dependent. Parents sacrificed financially to meet the school's needs, and teachers and administrators put in extra time for professional development,

---

[16]See Delpit, L. (1996). Skills and other dilemmas of a progressive black educator. American Educator, 20 (3), 9-11, 48; Foster, M. (1990). The politics of race: Through the eyes of African-American teachers. Journal of Education, 172 (3), 123-141; Irvine, R., & Irvin, J. (1983). The impact of the desegregation process on the education of black students: Key variables. The Journal of Negro Education, 52 (4), 410-422; Jones, F. C. (1981). A Traditional Model of Educational Excellence: Dunbar High School of Little Rock, Arkansas. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press; Sowell, T. (1976). Patterns of black excellence. The Public Interest, 43, 26-58; Walker, E. V. S. (1993a). Interpersonal caring in the "good" segregated schooling of African American children: Evidence from the case of Caswell County Training School. Urban Review, 25 (1), 63-77; Walker, E. V. S. (1993b). Caswell county training school, 1933-1969: Relationships between community and school. Harvard Educational Review, 63 (2), 161-182; Walker, V. (1995). Research at risk: Lessons learned in an African American community. Educational Foundations, 9 (1), 5-15; Walker, E. V. S. (1996). Can institutions care? Evidence from the segregated schooling of African American children. In M. J. Shujaa (Ed.), Beyond desegregation: The politics of quality in African American schooling (pp. 209-226). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.; and Walker, V. S. (1996). Their highest potential: An African American school community in the segregated South. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

specialized student assistance, and home visits. The result was a school that placed the needs of African American students at the center of its mission, which was in turn shared by the community.[17] Beginning in 1916, Booker became the first standard high school for African Americans in the city of Columbia, as well as, one of the first accredited high schools for African Americans in the State of South Carolina. The school created an atmosphere of mutual respect and pride in which learning could take place.

Studies by Thomas Sowell (*Patterns of Black Excellence*, 1976), Faustine Jones (*A Traditional Model of Educational Excellence*, 1981), and most recently Vanessa Siddle Walker (*Their Highest Potential*, 1996), have provided a retrospective look at the "good" historical segregated schooling of African Americans. In discussing Frederick Douglas High School in Baltimore, Sowell describes teachers with degrees from Harvard, Brown, Smith, and Cornell. John Stevenson reflected on the teachers at Booker,

> ...And the teachers were very strong, very well-prepared. They prided themselves on having strong academic credentials. Many of the teachers were educated in some of the better institutions throughout this country.

Sowell notes that the teachers in his study often put in extra time, without pay,

---

[17]Walker, V. S. (1996). Their highest potential: An African American school community in the segregated South. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

"especially to work with promising students from low socioeconomic backgrounds." They are remembered as actively counseling students on their own. John Stevenson had similar memories of the teachers at Booker,

> The teachers themselves were extremely interested in the education of the students. They did everything they could to see that the students succeeded and worked very hard at that.

The common denominators Sowell found in his study could be a description of many Southern, public, black high schools. They speak of "dedication to education, commitment to the children, and faith in what it was possible to achieve." In this case study of Booker, the data shows similar findings as does Jones' survey of graduates from Dunbar High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Teachers are remembered for their openness to students, their understanding of their problems, and their expectations that students would work to their fullest potential. Teachers were available to students outside the formal class structure--a finding that Jones uses to explain why the students wanted to please them in the classroom. Herbert Nelson says that what made Booker was the caliber of teachers, principals, and students. According to Ulysses Barber,

> The school I attended did more for its own race. They taught you that you must apply yourself in all things. The principals and teachers kept you on your toes all the time.

Nonetheless, regardless of the ideas expressed, and no matter how

forcefully the expectations for African American teachers were articulated, their fulfillment was problematic. Writing on the "efficiency" of black teachers in his classic 1934 work *The Education of the Negro in the American Social Order*, Horace Mann Bond provided an interpretation unique in the literature, observing that the "possibilities" of African American teachers were "severely restricted by the crushing weight of general social maladjustment." W. E. B. Du Bois made an analogous remark in his *The Souls of Black Folk* with regard to the Freedmen's Bureau schools of an earlier era, commenting that "the large legacy" of the educational activities sponsored by this short-lived federal agency was "the work it did not do because it could not." Michael Fultz believes that both Bond and Du Bois sound an important cautionary note regarding the upper limits of mass American educational achievement, emphasizing the restrictive ceiling imposed by a host of contextual factors--encompassing the social, economic, and political powerlessness of African American communities, particularly those in the rural South, and how that powerlessness played out with regard to education.[18]

Interpretation of the data gathered for this paper is presented by using an orienting theory that supports the belief that "good/excellence" was evident at

---

[18]Fultz, M. (1995). African American teachers in the South, 1890-1940: Powerlessness and the ironies of expectations and protest. History of Education Quarterly, 35 (4), 401-422.

Booker during its existence as a segregated high school in the South. The orienting theory corresponds closely to the data presented in this paper as well as others (Jones, Sowell, Walker) and can be applied to other similar studies like Joseph Michael Hathaway's study "The Class of 1944 of Lincoln High School: Finding Excellence in A Black Segregated School." Many people in the community and others of the Southern United States familiar with similar experiences are able to understand and relate to this "goodness." This orienting theory is a general guide for previous studies of this sort and future research endeavors of a similar kind. In the Booker Study, the facts are "correct," therefore so is the theory. The oral interview data are "authentic."[19] This orienting theory of "good" at Booker enables other educational researchers to have enough control to make its applications, presented in this paper, worth trying in other case studies. This study provides an orienting theory that offers a sufficient number of general concepts (character traits of teachers--consideration for others, conduct, tolerance, scholarship, culture, and understanding of human nature--to provide an atmosphere where "good" learning and high standards were expected, set,

---

[19]Authentic in this case study means that the oral interview data represent the community's actual way of seeing and interpreting events surrounding Booker T. Washington High School. I obtained oral interview data that accurately reflect the views actually held by the informants included in this study. See Emilie Vanessa Siddle Walker (1995) *Research at Risk: Lessons Learned in an African-American Community*, Educational Foundations, 9 (1), pp. 5-15.

maintained, and most of all, achieved).

Ambrose Caliver and others proclaimed that "In the hands of the Negro teachers rests the destiny of the race" and other similar lofty sentiments. Penetrating the "mind and conscience of America," exposing and protesting the dismal conditions of African American schooling in the South, including problems within the African American teaching corps, were laudable and necessary aspects of African American protest movements. But too often the "encouraging" aspects of black teachers' performance, their contributions to racial service and uplift through their persistence in the profession, were overlooked, ignored, and not sufficiently or publicly appreciated.[20] I urge educational historians to revisit the public, black, segregated high schools of the South in an effort to tell the other side of the story, some "good," including excellent teachers, was evident in these institutions. Studies by Thomas Sowell, Faustine Jones, and Vanessa Siddle Walker provide a foundation upon which to build the literature exemplifying the "good" learning opportunities that were available in these institutions. In this case study on Booker, the data show dedicated, loving, caring, and committed teachers who were deemed excellent and who expected excellence

---

[20]Fultz, M. (1995). African American teachers in the South, 1890-1940: Powerlessness and the ironies of expectations and protest. History of Education Quarterly, 35 (4), 401-422.

in their students. African American teachers were obligated to "be in sympathy" with their pupils, to set "higher ideals" before them, to serve as role models, and to foster new ambitions, aspirations, and motivation: "He [the student] is shown the highest and best in life and assured that he can obtain them as well as anybody else if he will only persist.[21] This paper offers a case in point which adds to this literature, providing concrete evidence that qualitative "good" educational experiences of the public, black, segregated high school is lacking and much needed in the literature on Southern educational history.[22]

---

[21]Fultz, M. (1995). African American teachers in the South, 1890-1940: Powerlessness and the ironies of expectations and protest. History of Education Quarterly, 35 (4), 401-422.

[22]See Thomas Sowell, "Patterns of Black Excellence." *Public Interest* 43 (1976): 26-58; See Faustine Jones, *A Traditional Model of Educational Excellence* (1981); and See Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential* (1996), pp. 215-219.

Oral Interviews

Tape Recorded Interviews

Adams, Fannie Phelps. Interview by author, December 5, 1996, Columbia, SC.
Student, Teacher, Guidance Counselor, Assistant Principal, and Acting Principal at Booker T. Washington High School. Graduated in 1934.

Barber, Ulysses Rufus. Interview by author, November 14, 1996, Hopkins, SC.
Student at Booker T. Washington High School. Graduated in 1934.

Bolden, Ethel Martin. Interview by author, June 5, 1997, Columbia, SC.
Student at Booker T. Washington High School. Graduated in 1936.

Carter, Carolyn Lloyd. Interview by author, November 11, 1997, Columbia, SC.
Student at Booker T. Washington High School. Graduated in 1959.

Fair, Gardinia Warley. Interview by author, November 11, 1997, Columbia, SC.
Student at Booker T. Washington High School. Graduated in 1938.

Goforth, Gladys Butler. Interview by author, March 19, 1996, Columbia, SC.
Student and teacher at Booker T. Washington High School. Graduated in 1944.

Nelson, Herbert C. Jr. Interview by author, January 30, 1997, Columbia, SC.
Student at Booker T. Washington High School. Graduated in 1946.

Reynolds, Robert. Interview by author, October 1, 1996, Columbia, SC.
Teacher and Coach at Booker T. Washington High School (1958-1974).

Richburg, Stonewall M. Interview by author, February 14, 1996, Columbia, SC.
Mechanical Drawing teacher at Booker (1946-1956) and Principal at Booker T. Washington High School (1965-1972). Only surviving principal at the time of

this study.

Robinson, Maude Johnson. Interview by author, October 23, 1997, Columbia, SC. Student at Booker T. Washington High School. Graduated in 1931. Daughter of C. A. Johnson, first principal of Booker T. Washington High School.

Ruff, Joseph E. Interview by author, June 11, 1997, Columbia, SC. Student at Booker T. Washington High School. Graduated in 1936.

Sims, Esther Ruth Butler. Interview by author and Carol Shields, November 6, 1995, Columbia, SC. Student at Booker T. Washington High School. Graduated in 1946.

Stevenson, John R. Interview by author, November 6, 1997, Columbia, SC. Mother was a teacher at Booker. He was a teacher in the Columbia City Schools beginning in 1955. Became an administrator in the Richland County School District One retiring as Superintendent of Schools.